

SUPPLEMENTARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE MUNNAR
SECTION OF THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SURVEY
OF TRAVANCORE AND COCHIN.

BY

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These notes are the result of two visits to Munnar, one from April 29th to June 1st, 1937, and one from April 9th to May 31st, 1938. My earlier arrival in 1938 enabled me to observe a larger number of the winter visitors who apparently leave before the end of April. As it happened, several birds observed by Mr. Sâlim Ali had already departed before the 9th of April. Before going on any further, I must pay tribute to the excellence and accuracy of the observations made by Mr. Sâlim Ali and his party during the survey of Travancore. The eight parts of the *Journal* of the B.N.H.S. were always found helpful and accurate too.

I should say that I shot no birds, and so I am ready to admit that some of my observations may be liable to question. All I can say is that as great care was taken as was possible, and that several observations made have been omitted through inability to give satisfactory confirmation. I also saw some birds which I could not confidently identify, and I think that there are probably more birds in Munnar than have yet been recorded.

In May 1937, the weather in Munnar was broken and showery, and the Monsoon winds had not begun by the 1st of June. In 1938 the weather was broken till the end of April. Early in May the S. W. winds began, accompanied by mist and long drizzles. On May 14th the N. or N.E. wind re-asserted itself, and a spell of fine weather followed which lasted till near the end of the month when heavy rain began to fall. It was noticed that when the rain fell in May, a general exodus of birds began from Munnar. During the return of fine weather, a few returned, but the majority remained away. Many of the birds that left Munnar may simply have moved to other areas in the High Range, for one of the features of the Kanan Devan Hills is the extraordinary variation in annual rainfall within a limited area. At the western edge, on the Pettimudi Estate, nearly 400 inches of rain have been recorded. Lockhart and Periakanal to the south record from 100 to 90 inches, and to the east, at Top Station and Chittavurrai the average fall is from 60 to 50 inches. Munnar itself has an average of 153 inches, and Devicolam, 5 miles away has an average of 113 inches. Of the Munnar average of 153 inches, about 107 inches fall in June, July, and August. I have had some opportunity of seeing the bird-life outside the immediate area of Munnar, and the impression I have gained while visiting some of the estates east of Munnar during

the second half of May was that birds were still being seen there which were no longer being seen in Munnar itself. I suggest that there is a considerable amount of local migration within the limits of the Kanan Devan Hills.

I think also that birds on migration northwards fly over these hills by a route from the Pullivassal Gap to Munnar town and then up the Kanniamallai river to the Nyamakad Gap, and thence *via* Maraiur to the plains. Mr. H. A. Ragg whose estate lies on this route seems to have more records than other observers, and I think that very probably the reason is that the birds pass his estate on their southern and northern journeys.

In my notes 'S.A.' refers to records specifically stated by Mr. Sālim Ali to have been made in Munnar. They are found in the *Journal* of the B.N.H.S., vols. xxvii, 4; xxxviii, 1-4; xxxix, 1-3. My own notes are indicated by 'J.B.P.'

CORVIDÆ.

Corvus machrorhynchus culminatus. Noted as absent. S.A.

Seen in April and May, but not in large numbers. Also seen in Silent Valley and at Madupatty (25th May), and reported from Kalaar to the west. A few of these birds seem to devote the hills in the hot weather. J.B.P.

Corvus splendens protegatus. Noted as absent. S.A. and J.B.P.

Machlolophus xanthogenys travancorensis. S.A. and J.B.P.

A few were seen as members of flocks.

Sitta frontalis frontalis. S.A. and J.B.P.

Fairly common in April but noted till the end of May.

TIMALIIDÆ.

Trochalopteron jerdoni fairbanki. S.A. and J.B.P.

Distribution wrongly given in *Fauna*, vol. i, p. 178, as S. Travancore. It should be N. Travancore, and that of the following bird *T. j. meridionale* as S. Travancore. Very common. Young birds seen early in May.

Pomatorhinus horsfieldi travancorensis. S.A. and J.B.P.

Very common and very vocal in April, but less heard in May. Seen both in sholas and on *Grevillea robusta* shade trees amongst the tea. In May commoner in the drier areas. Probably a local migrant.

PYCNONOTIDÆ.

Microscelis psaroides ganeesa. S.A. and J.B.P.

More commonly seen in April than in May, but still fairly common in May up to about the 14th; then growing scarcer till, at the end of the month, it was absent.

Molpastes cafer cafer. Noted as absent. S.A. So also J.B.P.

Otocompsa jocosca fuscicaudata. S.A. and J.B.P.

Very common. Frequently observed feeding on *Rubus ellipticus*. Once a bird hung to the fruit by its bill and vibrated its wings until the fruit was detached from the stalk. Also observed taking nectar from garden bushes, e.g. Japanese Lantern.

TURDIDÆ.

Brachypteryx major albiventris. S.A.

Doubtful. Very difficult to distinguish between this and *Eumiyas albicaudata* in the field. I found it easier to note its presence by the song than by sight. J.B.P.

Tarsiger brunnea brunnea. Not observed. Probably had already migrated. S.A. and J.B.P.

Saxicola caprata atrata. S.A. and J.B.P.

Very common. Young males were seen in late April and early May in brown plumage with white patches appearing.

Turdus simillimus mahrattensis, } S.A. and J.B.P.
T. bourdilloni. }

Difficult to distinguish. Blackbirds were heard singing up to the end of May. My impression is that Bourdillon's blackbird was most common. Other observers also agree. Towards the end of May the birds seemed to be found more at the 6,000 ft. level.

Monticola solitaria pandoo. S.A. and J.B.P.

One bird seen once, at end of April.

Myophonus horsfieldii S.A. and J.B.P.

Quite common, and sang well especially when the mists came up. This bird has a high-pitched whistle repeated at intervals when feeding, less in volume than, but similar to that of the Grackle and Scaly-bellied Green Woodpecker, and greater in volume than that of the White-eye.

MUSCICAPIDÆ.

Siphia parva albicilla. Not recorded. S.A.

Twice doubtfully seen on the edge of a shola towards the end of April. The red breast caught the eye. J.B.P.

Muscicapula tickelliae tickelliae. Not seen. S.A. and J.B.P.**Eumiyas albicaudata.** S.A. and J.B.P.

Frequently heard and seen in April, but rarely in May near Munnar. It was seen in the higher and drier areas later in May, but some of these records may be confusions with *Brachypteryx*.

Alseonax muttui. Not recorded. S.A.

One pair was seen in the Parsonage compound, in which I was staying right up to the end of May. I had almost daily opportunities of watching them. The large brown-eye with the whitish ring round it was noticeable. Mr. Sâlim Ali doubts whether this bird is resident. From the fact that I saw it up till the end of May in Munnar and also at Arivikad on May 25th ca. 5,500 ft. it seems as if the *Fauna* prediction had some evidence in support of it. Cf. *Fauna*, vol. ii, p. 252. I watched carefully for signs of breeding in Munnar, but found none. The Munnar birds were quite tame. I often watched them, perching on a wire fence, and on a poinsettia bush, and making sallies to capture flies, descending occasionally to the ground. J.B.P.

Ochromela nigrorufa. Not recorded. S.A.

Very curiously I saw this bird frequently in 1937, but did not see it at all in 1938 though I often was at its former haunts.

Culicapa ceylonensis ceylonensis. Not recorded. S.A.

Frequently seen in Munnar and at Old Devicolam, 1,000 ft. higher up, and elsewhere in the hills, singly and in pairs in April and in May. J.B.P.

Tchitrea paradisi. Not recorded. S.A.

One bird in the chestnut plumage was seen near the High Range Club in the third week of April. Probably it had come up through the Pullivassal Gap. Residents say that the Paradise Flycatcher is seen, but rarely, in all plumages. Probably all are passage migrants. J.B.P.

LANIIDÆ.

Lanius schach caniceps. Not recorded. S.A.

Seen quite frequently in April and in May near Munnar and in the neighbourhood. One bird with a twig in its mouth was seen about the end of April. Noted at 6,400 ft. on May 17th and at 6,000 ft. on May 25th. J.B.P.

Lanius cristatus cristatus. S.A. and J.B.P.

Seen in much the same facies as *caniceps*, but not after the end of April. In April, the numbers of this shrike and the previous were fairly equal.

Hemipus picatus picatus. Not recorded. S.A.

Very commonly seen both in April and in May right up to the end. Parties numbering from 3 to 5 frequented the high trees, and went round the compound daily, several times in a regular route, sometimes with other small birds and sometimes with *Pericrocotus flammeus*. Their sweet notes were easily distinguishable whenever they appeared. J.B.P.

Pericrocotus flammeus. Not recorded. S.A.

Seen frequently in Munnar and in other parts of the district in April, and up to the end of May. J.B.P.

DICRURIDÆ.

Chaptia aenea malayensis. Not recorded. S.A.

I thought I saw it once in the Parsonage compound, but it may have been the common King Crow. It was dusk so I could not be certain. Others, however, have recorded *aenea* in these hills. J.B.P.

SYLVIIDÆ.

Acrocephalus dumetorum. Not seen. S.A. and J.B.P.

Phylloscopus nitidus. S.A. and J.B.P.

Either *nitidus* or *viridanus*, probably *viridanus*, was common in April and disappeared early in May. It was associated with *Cimyrus minima*, *Zosterops*, and sometimes with *Hemipus* in the daily tours of the garden trees. I watched the birds carefully for considerable periods, and came to the conclusion that *viridanus* was the subspecies, but they move so rapidly, and keep so well hidden that accurate observation is not easy.

There are other warblers to be seen on the grasslands in the dry parts of the district, but I could not achieve certainty in identification.

EULABETIDÆ.

Gracula religiosa indica. S.A. and J.B.P.

Several pairs were nesting when I arrived in Munnar in the second week of April. One pair had its nest in a hole in an acacia tree in the Parsonage compound about 25 ft. above ground. In another hole of the same tree, about 8 ft. above ground, a pair of Jungle Mynas were nesting at the same time. The Grackles held their nest up till the end of May.

STURNIDÆ.

Æthiopsar fuscus maharattensis. S.A. and J.B.P.

Very common both in the High Range and in the Palnis as high as Kodaikanal. This is one of the species whose range appears to be extending

with the increased areas of cultivation in the hills. A pair nested in the Parsonage compound as noted above.

FRINGILLIDÆ.

Carpodacus erythrinus roseatus. Not seen. S.A. and J.B.P.

HIRUNDINIDÆ.

Riparia concolor. Not recorded. S.A.

Seen at about 5,500 ft. near Periyakanal. Three young were seen on a rocky ledge in a cliff while the parent birds fed them on the wing. The young birds vibrated their wings and showed great excitement as the parents swooped near, and dropped food into their bills. This was on April 23rd. J.B.P.

Hirundo javanica domicola. Not recorded. S.A.

Seen frequently in and around Munnar. Common also in Kodaikanal. Young birds were seen in a nest in the third week of April under the eaves of a bungalow in Munnar. J.B.P.

MOTACILLIDÆ.

Motacilla maderaspatensis. S.A. and J.B.P.

Common in Munnar and beside the larger streams. One young bird with ashy brown back was seen feeding near the Pullivassal Power House on 14th May.

Motacilla cinereas caspica. S.A. and J.B.P.

Common in April, but wholly absent in May. The last was seen on April 29th.

Motacilla flava similima. Not recorded. S.A.

One flock of over 30 birds was seen in the river bank in Munnar Golf Course on April 12th. They were not seen again. Probably they had come up through the Pullivassal Gap, and were resting preparatory to their flight north. J.B.P.

Anthus hodgsoni hodgsoni Not recorded. S.A.

Seen once or twice in April in the Parsonage compound. Probably on migration. J.B.P.

Anthus rufulus malayensis. S.A. and J.B.P.

Seen on the grasslands above Munnar.

ALAUDIDÆ.

Alauda gulgula australis. Not recorded. S.A.

Seen often on the grasslands above Munnar. J.B.P.

ZOSTEROPIDÆ.

Zosterops palpebrosa nilghiriensis. S.A. and J.B.P.

Common in gardens and in sholas. Usually associated with the Small Sunbird and the Greenish Willow Warbler in the daily rounds. In probing the flowers of the Japanese Lantern, the bill is inserted, not into the cup, but from outside between the calyx and the petals. The Red-whiskered Bulbul does this also; why? The numbers in May diminished towards the end of the month but some were always present.

NECTARINIDÆ.

Cinnyris minima. Not recorded. S.A.

Common in Munnar and in the sholas up to over 6,000 ft. Seen both in full plumage and in eclipse plumage. In May only eclipse plumage was seen. J.B.P.

Arachnothera longirostra longirostra. Not recorded. S.A.

Not seen, but reported by other observers from Periyakanal (5,000 ft.) in September. J.B.P.

DICAEDÆ.

Dicaeum concolor concolor. Not recorded. S.A.

Not seen. This seems very surprising. The bird is very common in Kodaikanal, 2,000 ft. higher than Munnar, and the trees and bushes on which it feeds are found in Munnar. It is recorded from Sānthanpāra, about 18 miles S.E. from Munnar, and 1500 ft. lower. I looked for it often, but never observed it. J.B.P.

PITTIDÆ.

Pitta brachyura. S.A.

Not seen, though I thought I heard one in a shola below Lockhart Gap on April 23rd. Residents say that this bird is only occasionally seen on some of the estates near Munnar in the cold weather. J.B.P.

PICIDÆ.

Picus xanthopygæus. Not recorded. S.A.

Seen at Munnar and up to 6,000 ft. and over. It is not common. A pair frequented the Parsonage compound in April and May. They feed on the same trees as a pair of Malherbe's Golden-backed Woodpeckers but not at the same times. J.B.P.

Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus chersonesus. S.A. and J.B.P.

Fairly common in April and May in and around Munnar. Their loud strident cry is often heard.

CAPITONIDÆ.

Thereiceryx viridis. Not recorded. S.A.

Fairly common in April and May, but heard and seen more often in April. A local migrant. I have heard it in May in the drier areas of the Kanan Devan Hills up to 6,000 ft. J.B.P.

CUCULIDÆ.

Centropus sinensis parroti. S.A. and J.B.P.

Common in Munnar and up to at least 6,000 ft. Their deep hoots are a feature of walks along the tea-estate roads. Met with both on grasslands and in shola.

PSITTACIDÆ.

Psittacula columboides. Not recorded. S.A.

Not seen in Munnar, but reported from Periyakanal (5,000 ft.). Many flocks seen at the Neriya Mangalam Bridge (200 ft.) on the Alwaye-Munnar road. J.B.P.

ALCEDINIDÆ.

Halcyon smyrnensis fusca. S.A. and J.B.P.

Common on all the streams in and near Munnar, and seen on Devicolam Lake, ca. 6,000 ft. Said to nest in the banks of the lake.

UPUPIDÆ.

Upupa epops ceylonensis. S.A. and J.B.P.

Seen in April and May quite often. In Kodaikanal I have seen a nest in May.

CHAETURINÆ.

Chaetura giganteus indicus. Not recorded. S.A.

This swift was seen several times in April and May in the Munnar valley. I do not think that it was there every day. There did not seem to be many of them, and I think that the few who were there ranged over a wide area.

I saw one or two other swifts, but was unable to identify them properly. One might have been a house swift, and another small and brownish, was fairly common. If it was the undernoted, I did not see a colony. J.B.P.

Collocalia fuciphaga unicolor. See S.A. on this bird.

I heard of a colony being found in a small cleft of a rock in these hills but did not see it myself. *N.B.*, vol. xxxix, no. 1, p. 29, 7 lines from top, for 'famous Pillar Rocks' should be read 'Travancore'.

BUBONINÆ.

Ketupa ceylonensis leschenault. Not seen. S.A. and J.B.P.

Several owls were seen all apparently of the same species, and the description agrees best with that of this owl. It has been reported from near Madupatty, and one was seen by me on the Perriavurrai estate ca. 5,500 ft. as well as lower down in and near Munnar. Residents say that this is the common owl of the district, and M. H. A. Ragg once shot an owl of this kind which was harrying the nest of a Malabar squirrel. J.B.P.

FALCONINÆ.

Falco tinnunculus objurgatus. Not recorded. S.A.

Seen in May over Munnar, and reported from near Madupatty. Common also on the Palnis up to over 7,000 ft. J.B.P.

Hieraaëtus fasciatus fasciatus. Not recorded. S.A.

One was seen on a tree in the Parsonage compound in April. For two or three hours on end it sat on the lower branch of a pine and repeated its shrill creaking call. After that day I did not certainly see it again. J.B.P.

Hæmatornis cheela melanotis. S.A. and J.B.P.

Seen occasionally in April and May flying high over Munnar. Identified by shrill triple whistle, though at times the whistle sounded only double.

Haliastur indus indus. Not recorded. S.A.

A pair was seen for some weeks over Munnar river. The birds departed about the middle of May, and re-appeared again towards the end of the month. J.B.P.

Milvus migrans govinda. S.A. and J.B.P.

One pair shared with the Brahminies the patrolling of the Munnar valley. They remained throughout April and May.

COLUMBINÆ.

Ducula badia cuprea Not recorded. S.A.

Seen twice; one bird ca. 5,500 ft. below the Lockhart Gap, and one flock of three on the Rajamally Ghat road about 6,000 ft. J.B.P.

Chalcophaps indica indica Not recorded. S.A.

Seen once feeding by the roadside at Devicolam, ca. 5,500 ft. J.B.P. Though I did not see them, there appear to be other Green Pigeons in the Kanan Devan Hills. Of these the Southern Green Pigeon was probably one.

Columba livia. Not recorded. S.A.

A small flock was seen several times flying down the Munnar valley in the early morning, and returning in the evening. This was in April. Not seen in May. J.B.P.

***Streptopilia chinensis suratensis*.** Noted as absent. S.A.

Very common in April and seen often in May up to the end of the month in Munnar and other places. One fed regularly on the lawn of the Parsonage garden. J.B.P.

PHASIANINÆ.

***Gallus sonneratii*.** Not recorded. S.A.

Not seen, but reported by residents as being fairly common. J.B.P.

PERDICINÆ.

***Galloperdix spadicea stewarti*.** Not recorded. S.A.

Not seen, but reported by residents as being occasionally seen. J.B.P.

***Cryptoplectron erythrorhynchum*.** Not recorded. S.A.

A covey of about 6 birds was once seen. Residents say it is fairly common. J.B.P.

TRINGINÆ.

***Tringa ochropus*.** Not seen. S.A. J.B.P.

***Tringa hypoleucos*.** S.A. and J.B.P.

Seen, up to about the middle of May, on the Munnar river flowing through the Golf Course.

SCOLOPACINÆ.

***Scolopax rusticola rusticola*.** Not recorded. S.A.

Mr. H. A. Ragg says that the Woodcock is still met with but very infrequently. The same remark applies to the following bird. J.B.P.

***Capella nemoricola*.** Not recorded. S.A. Not seen. J.B.P.

***Capella stenura*.** Not seen. S.A. and J.B.P.

ARDEIDÆ.

***Ardeola grayii*.** Not recorded. S.A.

Seen often on the Munnar river and Golf Course in April, but not after the middle of May. J.B.P.